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Structure and metallicity of phase V of hydrogen

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A new phase V of hydrogen was recently claimed in experiments above 325 GPa and 300 K. Due to the extremely small sample size at such record pressures the measurements were limited to Raman spectroscopy. The experimental data on increase of pressure shows decreasing Raman activity and darkening of the sample, which suggests band-gap closure and impending molecular dissociation, but no definite conclusions could be reached. Furthermore, the available data is insufficient to determine the structure of phase V, which remains unknown. Introducing the saddle-point *ab initio* random structure searching strategy (sp-AIRSS), we find several new structural candidates of hydrogen which could describe the observed properties of phase V. We investigate hydrogen metallisation in the proposed candidate structures, and demonstrate that smaller band gaps are associated with longer bond lengths. We conclude that phase V is a stepping stone towards metallisation.

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INTRODUCTION

The phase diagram of hydrogen is central to fundamental physics and astrophysics [1–4]. Currently the most interesting question probably relates to the metallisation and dissociation of molecular hydrogen under pressure, which has not yet been achieved in the solid state, even though it was first proposed in 1935 [5]. The known phases I, II, III, and IV/IV' of solid hydrogen, which have been characterised extensively, both experimentally [6–10] and theoretically [11–19], exhibit molecular bonds and are insulating.

Dalladay-Simpson and co-workers recently reported diamond anvil cell experiments reaching unprecedented pressures of up to 388 GPa at 300 K [20]. Using Raman spectroscopy, they identified a new phase V of hydrogen above 325 GPa and 300 K, which could be a stepping stone towards full metallisation and dissociation. Following from that report, Erements and co-workers provided data at similar pressures and temperatures, and concluded that phase IV' is in reality a mixture of phases IV and V, and that the transition identified in Ref. [20] corresponds to the transition to pure phase V [21]. Even more recently, Dias and Silvera reported hydrogen metallisation at 495 GPa and low temperatures [22], but this work has received strong criticism regarding an overestimation of the measured pressure and

the validity of the interpretation of the reflectivity data used to establish metallisation [23, 24]. Erements and co-workers used Raman spectroscopy and electrical conductivity measurements to study the low temperature phase diagram of hydrogen, and reported a semimetallic state of hydrogen starting at 360 GPa and 100 K within a phase III-like structure and without molecular dissociation [25]. We note that the different experimental groups use different names to describe the phases located in the same pressure-temperature region of the phase diagram. Here, we refer to phases IV, IV', and V as described in Refs. [10, 20].

These recent experimental developments suggest that metallisation and dissociation of solid hydrogen might be within reach. However, the extreme pressures required place severe limits on the probes that can be used to study the new phases, as exemplified by the large discrepancies in the measurements, analysis and interpretation of the data. As a consequence the structures and most of the properties of hydrogen phases above about 300 GPa remain unknown.

On the theoretical front, a number of candidate structures have been proposed to explain the observed experimental phases of high-pressure hydrogen up to 300 GPa [11, 13, 14, 26]. Of these, the monoclinic *C2/c* structure is currently the best candidate for phase III around 300 GPa [11, 26], as it exhibits Raman and infra-

red (IR) spectra consistent with those observed experimentally. The monoclinic Pc structure is the best candidate for phase IV [13, 14] due to its mixed layered nature that leads to the two vibron peaks observed experimentally. Recent quantum Monte Carlo and free energy calculations have confirmed these phases to be energetically favourable in the pressure range in which phases III and IV are observed [19]. The most stable atomic hydrogen candidate structure is tetragonal and has space group $I4_1/amd$ [11, 12, 17, 18].

Despite the large number of candidate structures known for high-pressure hydrogen, none provides a good model for the recent experimental observations at pressures above about 300 GPa. In this work, we use a novel computational strategy, saddle-point *ab initio* random structure searching (sp-AIRSS), to search for new hydrogen structures at pressures above 300 GPa, and contrast their physical properties with the experimental observations. We identify a number of previously unknown high pressure hydrogen structures, of which the energetically most competitive is an orthorhombic structure of space group $Pca2_1$. The Raman spectrum of this structure is consistent with that observed experimentally in Ref. [20], and we therefore propose it as a **physically reasonable** model for phase V of hydrogen.

STRUCTURE SEARCHES

Discovering candidate structures using searching methods has been successful in many systems, particularly at high pressure [27–31]. As an example, the lowest-enthalpy candidate structures for phases II, III, and IV of hydrogen have been found using AIRSS [11, 13, 14]. The experimental discovery of phase V, for which there is no obvious candidate structure, prompts the question of whether it is necessary to go beyond current structure searching methods in this case.

Standard structure searching methods such as AIRSS are restricted to structures associated with minima of the potential energy landscape. However, thermodynamically stable structures associated with saddle points that are dynamically stabilised by anharmonic nuclear motion are known to exist [32, 33]. The high-temperature cubic perovskite phase of $BaTiO_3$ provides a well-known example [32, 34].

A variety of computational methods has been used to determine the dynamical stability of such structures, including Monte Carlo [34], molecular dynamics [35, 36], path integral molecular dynamics [37, 38], and local anharmonic vibrational methods [39–43]. These methods can determine the dynamical stability of a known saddle-point structure but, as far as we are aware, they have not been used to find previously unknown saddle-point structures. The following question arises: can we devise a systematic approach to searching for previously

unknown structures associated with saddle points of the energy landscape? The large nuclear effects of hydrogen make it an ideal system in which to explore this possibility.

We have developed the sp-AIRSS strategy to address this question. Saddle-point structures stabilised by anharmonic nuclear motion are typically of higher symmetry than their *broken-symmetry* counterparts. Based on this observation, we use sp-AIRSS to impose high-symmetry constraints during structure searches. For example, imposing cubic symmetry on $BaTiO_3$, leads to the known cubic phase, but removing the symmetry constraints leads instead to the rhombohedral phase. The symmetry constraints bias the search towards the high-symmetry structures that are expected to be stable when the vibrational amplitudes are large. We then remove the symmetry constraints and relax the reference structure using an anharmonic vibrational method. In this work we have used the vibrational self-consistent field method of Ref. [42]. We note, however, that any of the available anharmonic methods may be applicable at this stage of the calculation [34–43]. The structure may then relax to a minimum or saddle point of the potential energy landscape.

The lowest-enthalpy known hydrogen structures have monoclinic symmetry with space groups $C2/c$ (model for phase III) and Pc (model for phase IV) [11, 13, 14]. To search for new candidate structures we have therefore performed sp-AIRSS searches imposing space groups of orthorhombic or higher symmetry. The searches have led to the discovery of three new energetically competitive structures at pressures for which phase V is observed. These structures have orthorhombic symmetry with space groups $Pca2_1$, $Pna2_1$, and $Pcaa$, and 48 atoms in the primitive cell. $Pca2_1$ and $Pna2_1$ are mixed layered structures similar to Pc in which alternate layers exhibit shorter and longer molecular bond lengths, resulting in two vibron peaks in the Raman and IR spectra. $Pcaa$ has a single type of layer.

Our analysis in this work is based on these three new structures, together with the previously reported structures $C2/c$ [11], $Cmca$ -4 and $Cmca$ -12 [11] (where 4 and 12 indicate the number of atoms in the primitive cell), Pc [13, 14] and $Ibam$ [11]. The $C2/c$ and $Cmca$ structures model phase III, and all theoretical methods predict that $C2/c$ is more stable at lower pressures and $Cmca$ at higher pressures, but the precise pressure above which $Cmca$ becomes stable is highly-dependent on the level of theory used. A hexagonal structure of space group $P6_122$ has recently been proposed as a candidate for phase III at pressures below 200 GPa [26], but in this work we focus on higher pressures, and therefore do not include it in our analysis. The $Ibam$ structure is an extreme member of the family of mixed structures, in which the weakly-bound layer is graphene-like and molecular bonds are no longer present.

Of all structures considered, $Pna2_1$ and $Pca2_1$ are dynamically unstable at the harmonic vibrational level, and their broken-symmetry counterpart is a monoclinic structure. $Ibam$ is also dynamically unstable, while the rest are dynamically stable. Note that unless sp-AIRSS had been used, $Pca2_1$ and $Pna2_1$ would have fallen into the corresponding broken-symmetry monoclinic structure, and would have gone unnoticed. The symmetry constraints prevent this and allow the potential discovery of new structures stabilised by anharmonic vibrations.

GIBBS FREE ENERGY AND RELATIVE STABILITY

We have used first-principles methods based on density functional theory (DFT) as implemented in the CASTEP [44] code to calculate the relative stability of the eight structures under consideration. We have used both the BLYP exchange-correlation functional [45, 46], which has been shown to be accurate for the description of molecular hydrogen structures [47], and the PBE exchange-correlation functional [48], which we find to favour atomic phases compared to the BLYP functional. Due to the small energy differences between competing structures of only a few meV, the resulting phase diagrams are sensitive to the level of theory used [19, 47, 49]. By providing results using two functionals that favour molecular and atomic phases respectively, we provide a confidence interval for the stability of the various structures that we discuss. To calculate the vibrational contribution to the energy including anharmonic contributions we use the method of Refs. [42, 50]. Further details of the first principles calculations are provided in the Supplemental Material.

In Fig. 1 we report static lattice enthalpies, zero-temperature enthalpies (including quantum zero-point motion), and Gibbs free energies at 300 K relative to $C2/c$. The static lattice enthalpies of $Pca2_1$, $Pna2_1$, and $Ibam$ are shown as dashed lines to indicate dynamical instability at the harmonic level corresponding to saddle points of the potential energy landscape. All three structures become dynamically stable when lattice vibrations are included.

For both BLYP and PBE calculations, we observe that the $Cmca-4$ structure is the lowest in energy at the higher pressures studied. This is consistent with earlier DFT studies, but we note that using more accurate quantum Monte Carlo calculations de-stabilises this structure and removes it from the phase diagram [19]. A similar argument holds for the $Cmca-12$ structure, and we will therefore ignore both structures in our subsequent analysis. Select quantum Monte Carlo results supporting this are presented in the Supplemental Material [51].

The BLYP results show that, of the mixed layered structures, $Pca2_1$ is the most competitive energetically at

both zero and 300 K, becoming more stable than $C2/c$ at pressures of about 420 GPa. The PBE results also favour $Pca2_1$ as the most stable mixed layered structure, but it becomes more stable than $C2/c$ at significantly lower pressures of about 300 GPa, consistently with the observation that PBE favours atomic phases compared to molecular phases ($Pca2_1$ has alternate layers with longer bond lengths than those observed in $C2/c$). We also note that, at the PBE level, Pc does not exist above about 375 GPa, as it falls into the $Cmca-4$ structure. Finally, we note that the $Pcaa$ structure, which is not energetically competitive at the BLYP level, becomes more competitive at the PBE level, a fact that we again attribute to the longer bond lengths exhibited by $Pcaa$ when compared to $C2/c$.

We have performed selected diffusion Monte Carlo calculations using the CASINO package [52] to confirm that $Pca2_1$ remains energetically competitive as a candidate structure of high pressure hydrogen when a more accurate treatment of electron correlation than that provided by DFT is used. The results are summarized in the Supplemental Material [51].

STRUCTURE OF PHASE V

The experimental Raman spectrum of phase V is compared to the theoretical harmonic spectra of Pc and $Pca2_1$ calculated using the PBE functional in Fig. 2. Figure 2a shows a comparison of the Raman intensities at 374 GPa. In the high-frequency regime, the frequency of the experimental ν_2 vibron agrees with those of Pc and $Pca2_1$. The frequency of the ν_1 vibron is better reproduced by Pc , but the difference with $Pca2_1$ is small. We also note that Magdău and Ackland showed that anharmonic contributions push the ν_2 vibron to higher energies in Pc [16], and a similar behaviour in $Pca2_1$ would bring the latter into better agreement with experiment. At the low-frequency regime, the L_1 and L_4 modes of phase V are in better agreement with $Pca2_1$ than with Pc . The L_2 mode, which disappears upon entering phase V, is present in Pc but missing in $Pca2_1$.

The pressure dependence of the Raman peaks is shown in Fig. 2b, with phase IV below 325 GPa, and phase V at higher pressures. The pressure dependence of the ν_2 vibron is well-reproduced by both Pc and $Pca2_1$. The frequency of the low-energy vibron has a pressure dependence of $-1.4 \text{ cm}^{-1}/\text{GPa}$ in phase V above 325 GPa, which is much weaker than that of phase IV at lower pressures (note the change in slope for ν_1 around 325 GPa). The pressure dependence of ν_1 in Pc and $Pca2_1$ is too weak at pressures below 325 GPa, suggesting that they are not good candidates for phase IV. However, we note that, as discussed earlier, anharmonic effects significantly affect this frequency [16], and therefore we cannot discard these structures as candidates for phase IV. The pressure

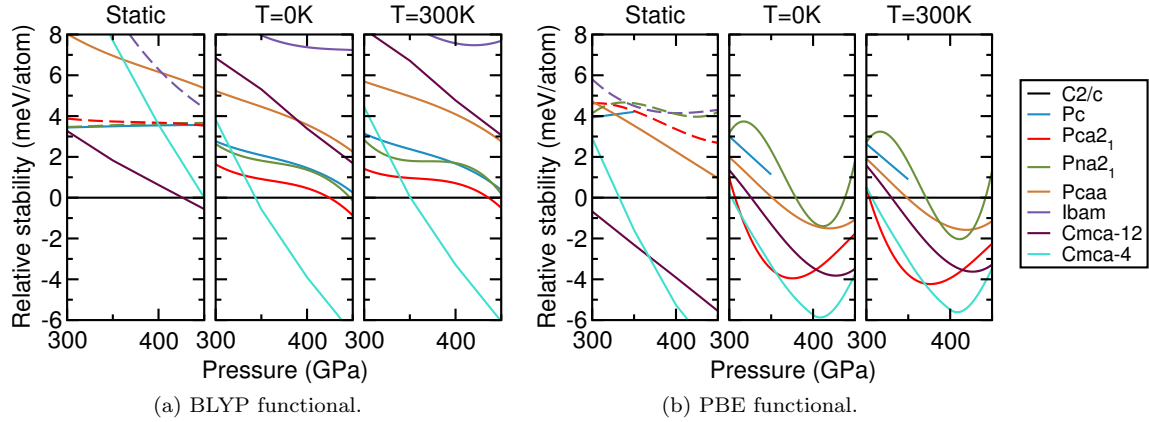


FIG. 1. Relative enthalpies at the static lattice level, relative enthalpies including zero-point quantum vibrations ($T = 0$ K), and relative Gibbs free energy at $T = 300$ K. The dashed lines in the static lattice diagram indicate enthalpies corresponding to structures at saddle-points of the energy landscape.

dependence of the low frequency part of the Raman spectrum of phase V is better-reproduced by $Pca2_1$ than by Pc .

A striking feature of the experimental Raman spectrum is the dramatic increase in the width of the L_1 peak upon entering phase V, whose FWHM increases from about 70 cm^{-1} at 325 GPa to about 160 cm^{-1} at 388 GPa. The experimental data show that the increase in the peak width is strongly isotope dependent [20], suggesting a nuclear origin for this feature. Therefore, it could be attributed to a harmonic dynamical instability like the one exhibited by the $Pca2_1$ and $Pna2_1$ structures.

Our Raman spectra analysis suggests that the $Pca2_1$ structure is consistent with phase V. The Raman spectrum of $Pna2_1$ is almost identical to that of Pc , and both give poorer agreement with experiment than $Pca2_1$. The $C2/c$, $Cmca$, and $Pcaa$ structures cannot describe phase V, as they have a unique type of bond and thus a single vibron. $Ibam$ is also an unlikely candidate for phase V, as its vibron ν_1 has a frequency below 2250 cm^{-1} in the pressure range where phase V is observed. Details of the Raman spectra of these phases are provided in the Supplemental Material [51].

Overall, $Pca2_1$ is energetically competitive at the pressures at which phase V has been observed, and its Raman spectrum is consistent with that of phase V. More generally, the known Pc structure and the new $Pna2_1$ and $Pca2_1$ structures are plausible candidates for the high pressure hydrogen structures characterised by two strong vibrons, that is, phases IV, IV', and V.

TOWARDS DISSOCIATION AND METALLISATION

Having discovered good candidate structures, we study the metallicity of phase V. The study of band gap closure and metallisation in high pressure hydrogen is a challenging problem. Band gaps are typically underestimated by several electronvolts by Kohn-Sham DFT [53, 54], whereas the neglect of electron-phonon coupling contributions tends to lead to an overestimation of the gap size [55, 56]. These two effects alter the gap in opposite directions, cancelling to some extent. We consider static lattice DFT band structures, which contain valuable insights on trends amongst the different structures, but cannot be used reliably to estimate the actual band gap values.

Metallisation in layered hydrogen structures has been proposed to arise from the weakly bound layers that can be described as distorted graphene sheets [57]. Here, we extend this analysis to mixed-layered structures, where layers with short and long bond lengths coexist. In Fig. 3a we show the electronic densities of states at 350 GPa for the four mixed layered structures considered in this work. Pc , $Pna2_1$, and $Pca2_1$ are all insulating. Of these four structures, $Pca2_1$ has the smallest band gap by about 0.3 eV. This is a consequence of the longer bond length in the weakly bound layers, as shown in Fig. 3b. The bond lengths of all of these structures in the strongly-bound layers are comparable.

Molecular dissociation is more pronounced in $Ibam$, as the weakly bound layers are graphene-like, and the molecular character is lost. This is shown by the longer bond lengths exhibited by $Ibam$ in the graphene sheets (Fig. 3b). The frequency of the ν_1 vibron in $Ibam$ increases with pressure, as expected from the decreasing bond length of the graphene sheets. In contrast, the increase in bond length with pressure in Pc , $Pna2_1$, and

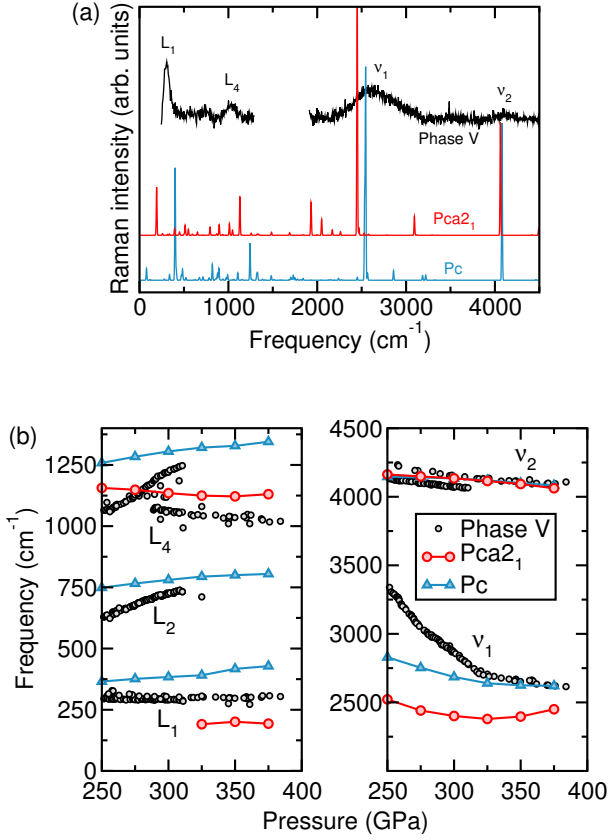


FIG. 2. (a) Raman spectra of *Pc*, *Pca2*₁, and phase V at 374 GPa. The absence of data in the range 1500–1900 cm⁻¹ arises from the strong signal from the diamonds at these frequencies. (b) Pressure dependence of the frequencies of the most intense Raman peaks of *Pc*, *Pca2*₁, and phase V.

*Pca2*₁ indicates that the pressure dependence of the ν_1 vibron in these structures is qualitatively different from that of *Ibam*, and consistent with the experimental observation in phase V. *Ibam* might become stable at higher pressures, although our DFT calculations do not support this conjecture.

For completeness, we emphasize that at 0 K, the metallic atomic *I4*₁/*amd* structure is predicted to become thermodynamically stable at a pressure of around 400 GPa [17, 18]. It would be interesting to assess the relative stability of *I4*₁/*amd* with respect to the mixed structures around room temperature, but this is beyond the scope of the present work.

Overall, our energetic and spectroscopic results show that *Pca2*₁ is a promising model structure for hydrogen phase V. It exhibits longer bond lengths compared to those of other similar structures, suggesting that phase V is a stepping stone towards the metallisation of hydrogen.

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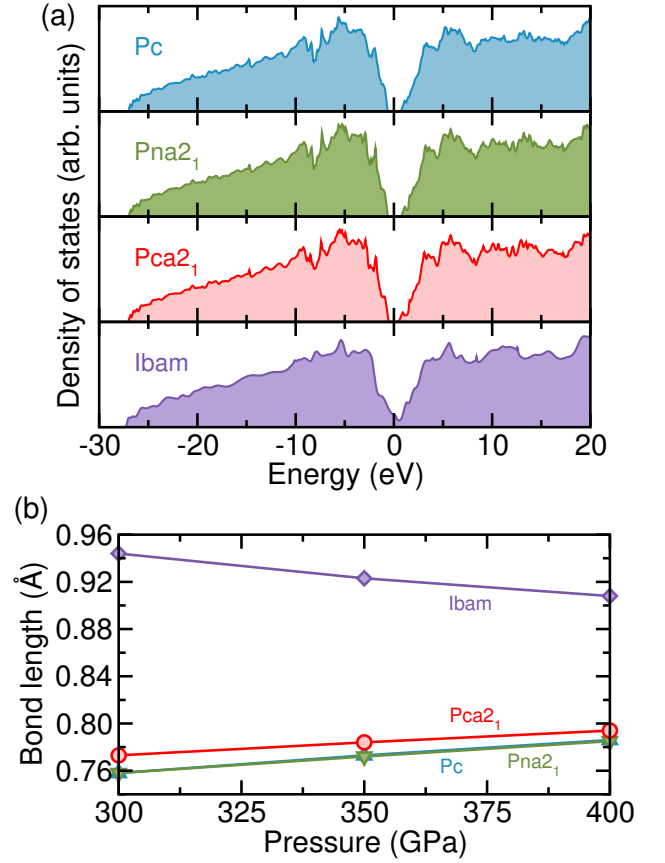


FIG. 3. (a) Electronic densities of states of hydrogen candidate mixed layered structures *Pc*, *Pna2*₁, *Pca2*₁, and *Ibam* at a pressure of 350 GPa. (b) Static bond lengths of the *Pc*, *Pna2*₁, *Pca2*₁, and *Ibam* structures for the layers with longer bonds. The bond lengths of *Pc* and *Pna2*₁ are indistinguishable.

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